

habits of good governance. And I will continue that focus and attention on the continent of Africa. I think it is vital that the continent of Africa be a place of freedom and democracy and prosperity and hope where people can grow up and realize their dreams. It's a continent that has got vast potential, and the United States wants to help the people of Africa realize that potential.

Thank you all.

NOTE: The President spoke at 9:38 a.m. in the Oval Office at the White House. In his remarks, he referred to President Aleksander Kwasniewski of Poland; President Valdas Adamkus of Lithuania; and Lt. Gen. David H. Petraeus, USA, chief, Office of Security Transition—Iraq.

Remarks on the Nomination of Governor Mike Johanns To Be Secretary of Agriculture December 2, 2004

The President. Thank you all. Good morning.

I am pleased to announce my nomination of Governor Mike Johanns to be the Secretary of Agriculture.

Gov. Johanns. Thank you, Mr. President.

The President. Governor Johanns is an experienced public service—servant from America's agricultural heartland. As the son of Iowa dairy farmers, he grew up close to the land. He will bring to this position a lifetime of involvement in agriculture and a long record of a faithful friend to America's farmers and ranchers. He will lead an important agency with the executive skill he has learned as mayor and as a two-term Governor of Nebraska.

I've known Mike for a number of years, going back to my own service as a Governor. I know firsthand his deep commitment to a strong farm economy. He's been a leader on drought relief in Nebraska and throughout the Midwest. He's a strong proponent of alternative energy sources such as ethanol and biodiesel. He's traveled the world to promote American farm exports.

Governor Johanns is a man of action and of complete integrity. He knows how to bring people together to achieve results. He has been a superb leader for the people

of Nebraska, and I'm grateful that he's agreed to take on this important new responsibility in my Cabinet.

Gov. Johanns. Thank you, Mr. President.

The President. I'm grateful as well to Secretary of Agriculture Ann Veneman for leading the Department of Agriculture these past 4 years. Secretary Veneman has earned the trust of farmers and ranchers across America, and the whole Nation has benefited from her service. Ann played a central role in passing the 2002 farm bill, which has been critical to the success of our farmers.

She's kept our Nation's commitment to fighting hunger and is overseeing major improvements in school nutrition programs. Ann led our efforts to prevent the spread of mad cow disease and worked hard to secure the food supply against the threat of bioterrorism. And she has helped set in motion an incredibly important effort to maintain the health of our forests and protect the lives and property from devastating wildfires.

I chose Ann Veneman for her great expertise, her sound judgment, and her bipartisan spirit, and she has displayed those qualities every day of her tenure. Ann has

also carried out her duties while facing serious illness, and for that she's earned my increased admiration and the respect of her fellow citizens. I'm proud to know her, and I thank her for serving our country.

The policies we've pursued over the last 4 years have revived America's economies and have helped our farmers and ranchers earn greater income and to sell record amounts of food and fiber abroad. In a new term, we'll continue policies that are pro-growth, pro-jobs, and pro-farmer. We'll keep working to open new markets to American grain and beef and cotton and corn. We'll enforce trade laws to make sure other countries play by the rules. We will expand conservation programs to help farmers and to protect our soil and water and wildlife.

We will stand behind family farmers by keeping taxes low and ensuring the Federal death tax is repealed permanently. And

when confirmed by the Senate, Mike Johanns will lead a Department of 113,000 dedicated public servants and be a champion of the farmers and ranchers who feed America and the world beyond.

I am grateful to Mike and to Stephanie, his wife, for their willingness to come to Washington. I look forward to welcoming Mike to my Cabinet.

Congratulations. I appreciate you.

Gov. Johanns. Thank you very much.

The President. You bet, Mike.

[At this point, Gov. Johanns made brief remarks.]

The President. Good job.

Gov. Johanns. Thank you.

NOTE: The President spoke at 11:42 a.m. in the Roosevelt Room at the White House. The transcript released by the Office of the Press Secretary also included the remarks of Gov. Johanns.

Remarks on Lighting the National Christmas Tree December 2, 2004

Thank you all very much. Tonight we begin a joyous season, and the city of Washington is never more beautiful than during the holidays. At Christmastime, we celebrate good tidings first announced 2,000 years ago and still a source of great joy in our world. Laura and I are always happy to join in the Pageant of Peace, and we thank you all for coming this evening.

I thank our special guests. I want to thank Santa for such good weather. [Laughter] I appreciate Peter, the chairman of the Pageant of Peace, and his wife, Nancy. I want to thank John Betchkal, the president of the Christmas Pageant of Peace. I want to thank the members of the board of the Christmas Pageant of Peace for your hard work in putting on this joyous festival. I want to thank Secretary of the Interior

Gale Norton. I want to thank other members of my Cabinet who are here tonight. I appreciate the Members of Congress who are here.

I want to thank Fran Mainella, who is the Director of the Parks Service, and all the National Parks Service employees. I thank Dr. Schuller and all the entertainers. Thanks so very much for being here tonight.

The season of Advent is always the season of hope. We think of the patient hope of men and women across the centuries who listened to the words of the prophets and lived in joyful expectation. We think of the hope of Mary, who welcomed God's plan with great faith. We think of the hope of the wise men who set out on a long journey guided only by a slender promise